

D. Methodology

I. Somerville Historic District Ordinance Background

In March 1985, the City of Somerville formally adopted a Historic District Ordinance to preserve and protect its most historically and architecturally significant properties. This ordinance was the culmination of many months of extensive research and considerable community effort. It also symbolized the immense pride that the people of Somerville, both citizens and public officials, have in their City's heritage and its rich and diverse architecture.

The Historic District Ordinance sets forth procedures for reviewing proposed exterior alterations or additions to buildings that have been surveyed and identified as historic on Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) inventory forms. The ordinance also established the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission (SHPC) to implement its policies and procedures. Since its founding in 1985, the SHPC has developed design guidelines to aid historic property owners in making appropriate and sensitive decisions about alterations, additions, and repairs. Over the past two decades the SHPC has reviewed over one thousand cases of exterior alterations, and after consultation and discussion with the owners, they approved the vast majority of the applications.

Since the initial designations in 1985 encompassing 105 LHDs and 135 properties, the City of Somerville, through its Historic Preservation Commission (SHPC), undertook one other major inventory and designation effort in 1988-89 in accordance with MHC guidelines. This effort resulted in the adoption of an additional 102 LHD's encompassing 167 properties throughout the City. In 2003, the SHPC also spearheaded an expansion of three smaller districts in the Prospect Hill area that led to an additional 9 properties being locally designated as historic. With the loss of only a few designated properties over time, often due to tragic fires, the number of Local Historic Districts in Somerville in 2006 currently total 203. While this is an impressive number, it is far less than the breadth of properties that are worthy of designation.

II. Local Historic District Expansion Project (2005-07)

Knowing that there still remained many eligible properties within the City's borders, the SHPC applied for a grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission in 2004 in order to undertake another round of comprehensive surveying and designation of historic properties. In recognition of the Commission's excellent track record, the MHC awarded the full grant of \$23,040 to be administered over a two-year period. Combined with funds from the City's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, the SHPC commenced the LHD Expansion Project in the fall of 2004 when it issued a Request for Proposals from qualified consultants to do the survey work. Edward Gordon, with subcontractor Arthur J. Krim, both well-respected and experienced architectural historians, were hired in early 2005 to conduct this latest inventory. The focus would be on religious properties and houses located in CDBG-eligible areas such as Union Square, East Somerville, and parts of the Powderhouse, West Somerville, Spring Hill, Ward 2

and Winter Hill neighborhoods. The consultants knew that the surveys would be the cornerstone of the second phase of the grant when the Preservation Commission would propose specific Local Historic Districts. A more detailed description of survey methodology, criteria and procedures follows.

III. Phase 1 -- Conducting an Inventory of Historic Properties as the Basis for LHD Designation

The consultants primarily worked from a list of over 200 properties that the SHPC staff had compiled since the last major surveying effort in 1989. Many of these properties had already been deemed historically eligible by the City's first comprehensive architectural survey in 1980-81. This earlier yearlong survey undertaken by Landscape Research principals Carole Zellie and Peter Stott included intensive preliminary research on the development of the City between 1630 and 1930. The development of Somerville's residential and commercial areas was documented in research reports on ten different neighborhoods and commercial squares, while the City's extensive industrial development was covered in a separate report. This information provided the background for a block-by-block survey of the entire City. Over 1,000 buildings were photographed and approximately 500 were recorded on architectural survey forms based upon their significance to the history of the City's development and their important architectural features. This research and survey information was the foundation for Carole's Zellie's seminal book in 1982 *Beyond the Neck: The Architecture and Development of Somerville, Massachusetts*.

In addition, the information helped the City's Historic District Study Committee in 1984-85, as well as the subsequent Historic Preservation Commission in 1988-89, to identify and propose the designation of the current 203 local historic districts in Somerville. Consistent with prior practice, the SHPC is still working toward designation of those properties identified in the preliminary 1980-81 survey that have not been irreversibly and inappropriately altered since that time. The consultants also selected properties to survey based upon owners' requests and ones they encountered as particularly worthy during their initial fieldwork.

A. Criteria for Property Surveying

All together the consultants reviewed nearly 220 properties throughout the City and ultimately chose to survey 160 properties based upon the following criteria:

1. Uniqueness in Somerville;
2. Good examples of a particular architectural style or type;
3. Form and massing that contribute to significant streetscapes;
4. Recent respectful restoration and/or rehabilitation;
5. Properties with potential for loss such as religious properties or structures on large lots;

6. Association with important national or local events and/or prominent figures; and
7. Location within a Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area (NRSA) or Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)-designated areas.

The consultants spent six weeks in the field, surveying and photographing properties by car and on foot. Most of the photography was conducted at the commencement of the project, despite inclement winter weather, to maximize views before spring foliage appeared. All of the research was documented on Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) inventory forms, known as Form B's, that included both their architectural and historical significance. For the most part the consultants agreed with the properties pre-identified by the SHPC staff and only added a handful of new structures based upon their professional expertise. The one hundred and sixty properties (160) chosen for representation on MHC survey forms are located within eleven areas, found within the following neighborhoods of the City: East Somerville, Prospect Hill/Union Square, Ward II, Central Hill, Spring Hill, Winter Hill, Ten Hills, Magoun Square-Hinckley St., Davis Square, Powder House Square, and West Somerville.

Selected properties range from **modest laborer's cottages**, such as the mid nineteenth-century wooden vernacular cottages at 60 Linden Street, 37 Fiske Avenue and 342 Lowell Street, through **mid-sized late Italianate residences** such as 54 Atherton Street, and **Mansard houses** of the 1860s and 70s, with particularly rich and interesting examples in East Somerville at 47 Franklin Street and 70 Pearl Street. **Queen Anne vernacular houses** of the 1880s and 1890s are well represented and include the end gable 14 Knapp Street and the more substantial 176 Summer Street (both houses are located on Spring Hill), 10 Bigelow Street on Prospect Hill, 41 Bartlett Street in Magoun Square area, and 35 Pearl Street in East Somerville. **Groups of row houses** are especially well represented within the survey by 39-43 Florence Street, 8-20 Summer Street, 29-33 Sargent Avenue, and 55-63 Adams Street.

Shingle Style structures with their boxy, compact, and intersecting gambrel and gable roof configurations, are less well represented in the City, but can be seen at 47 Craigie Street. Several fine examples of the **Colonial Revival** style can be found on Spring Hill at 34 Central Street (1890s), at 167 Highland Avenue (1900), and at 2 Benton Road (1890-94).

One of Somerville's most notable residential building types is its extensive collection of **two-family residences** built between 1890 and 1930. This multi-family house type frequently has boxy, rectangular forms enclosed within massive intersecting gambrel or gable-roofed buildings. While well-crafted and nicely detailed two-family houses are located throughout the City, the neighborhood between Powder House Circle and the Medford boundary has a particularly rich set as seen at 773 Broadway and 5 Pearson Road.

Although views of property interiors were rare, the consultants did manage to arrange for a visit inside the Ireland-Dane House at 461 Somerville Avenue, to find clues to its date of construction. Interior elements, such as its fireplace mantles in the Late Georgian and

Federal style, combined with research at the Middlesex County Registry of Deeds, enabled the consultants to date this dwelling to as early as 1791-1802.

Somerville is overwhelmingly a city of wooden structures. The original clapboard and wood shingle sheathing of many houses, however, has been obscured by the application of aluminum or vinyl siding. This siding also typically covers over, or totally removes, window and door framing as well as decorative architectural woodwork. Fortunately in recent years, many Somerville homeowners have chosen to undertake respective rehabilitation work. They have restored original features on their properties and highlighted architectural elements through paint colors. This deserves public recognition and historic designation, as in the case of 50 Mt. Vernon Street.

Although a major inventory of commercial and industrial properties was completed in 1990 a few more commercial buildings were inventoried in this round, such as 99 Beacon Street and 380 Somerville Avenue. Intact outbuildings such as stables, barns and garages have also been identified, as seen in the substantial late nineteenth century stables still standing at 25 Hamlet Street and in the backyards of 36 Marshall Street and 50 Sargent Street.

Thirteen houses of worship were also inventoried due to their design, craftsmanship and historic role within a given neighborhood. Although some of them were previously surveyed, the information was scant and not well documented. The consultants' diligent research of various local history sources helped them embellish and highlight the important role that these religious properties have played in the development of Somerville and its people.

In addition to the above factors, National Register criteria were applied to each property to determine which buildings and structures might also be eligible for that list. The National Register of Historic Places provides national recognition, protection from federally-funded projects, as well as eligibility to participate in the investment tax credit program when income-producing historic properties are being rehabilitated. Approximately 87 individual properties were either already on the National Register of Historic Places, or were found to be "Individually Eligible", and another 14 properties were deemed eligible to be part of a larger National Register District. All of these NR properties are indicated by an asterisk in the Report.

B. Research Procedure

Research focused on determining the date of construction (or if not possible, the age range), the name of the architect and/or builder, the original property owner(s), as well as the later owners and occupants up to 1940, and the original appearance of the given building. The sequence of development in the neighborhood and the pattern of street layout were also investigated. All of this information was recorded on the individual Form B's required by the MHC, and descriptive maps, and black and white photographs were added. The procedure followed these general stages:

1. Field observation, photography, and building description;
2. Examination of maps and atlases (1830, 1852, 1857, 1874, 1884, 1895, 1900) using the history collections housed at the Somerville Central Library on Highland Avenue and the Special Collections Library of the Massachusetts State House.
3. Review of Somerville Directories (1851 and 1869/70 to 1940). Note: Directories commence street-by-street listings of occupant names in 1903;
4. Examination of Water Department “drain pipe” records with connector dates and owner names;
5. Study of local and county histories, as well as other Somerville–related materials housed in the Somerville History Room at the Central Library. The history of the City is well documented in a half dozen histories published at the turn of the twentieth century, including *The Beautiful City of Seven Hills: Its History and Opportunities* (1912) by the Somerville Board of Trade, and especially *Somerville Past and Present* (1897) by Edward A. Samuels. The “horizontal files” within the Somerville History Room at the Central Library were extensively consulted for information on churches and individuals. *Historic Leaves*, a publication of the Somerville Historical Society from 1898-1908, and *The Somerville Journal*, the newspaper of record for the community since the late nineteenth century, was mined for obituaries, municipal anniversaries, descriptions of dedicatory services for buildings, and the like;
6. Reading of Somerville Town Poll Tax Records from 1843-1872;
7. Extensive deed research at the Middlesex County Registry of Deeds in East Cambridge; and
8. Review of Somerville Assessing Department records (available on-line) for the current use of the property, construction materials, etc. Sections of their current maps were downloaded to locate each property on its MHC survey form.

C. LHD Project Maps

Somerville Department of Assessor’s Maps were used to designate Local Historic Districts that are proposed (in red) or that are existing (in green). Properties that are located in existing National Register Districts, but are not being recommended for inclusion in a Local Historic Districts are indicated in purple.

D. Property Street Address Index

Two types of indexes were prepared to outline the proposed LHD Districts:

1. A listing by neighborhood of all proposed Local Historic Districts that includes the property address, historic name, date of construction, and architectural style, plus its MHC Inventory Form number; and.

2. An alphabetized street listing of all proposed Local Historic Districts that includes the property address, historic name, date of construction, architectural style, and neighborhood location, plus its MHC Inventory Form number.

IV. Phase 2 -- LHD Neighborhood Meetings and Preparation of Preliminary Report

In order to complete the second phase of the MHC's Survey & Planning grant work the SHPC solicited proposals from qualified consultants to help them expand the number of significant historic properties protected from unsympathetic alteration or demolition through the designation of additional local historic districts in Somerville. Again architectural historian Edward W. Gordon was retained to disseminate information to property owners regarding the significance of their properties and the benefits and requirements of LHD designation, and to prepare a Preliminary Report complying with M.G.L. Chapter 40C legislation to create new or expanded local historic districts.

During the early part of the summer of 2006 the SHPC staff compiled a list of all of the owners of record in the Assessor's Office whose properties were deemed eligible for historic designation. The list included owner names, mailing addresses, telephone numbers, and email addresses in rare cases. The lists were grouped by neighborhoods, except in the instance of the religious properties that were separately grouped. Using these lists the consultant conducted a telephone survey in June, July and early August to alert every owner about the historic significance of their property, and to invite them to one of a series of upcoming neighborhood meetings. The meetings were designed to explain in greater detail the purpose of the overall LHD Expansion Project, as well as to describe why their property was included, and the steps involved in the LHD designation process. Prior to each set of neighborhood calls a package of materials was sent to each owner that included an introductory letter from the City about the overall project, a copy of the MHC survey form detailing the architectural and historical significance of their property, and an invitation to attend one of the scheduled upcoming meetings. (See the Appendices of this Report for sample copies of this material.)

Over the course of the summer the SHPC Staff and the Consultant conducted ten (10) informational meetings, including seven neighborhood meetings, one devoted exclusively to religious properties, and two overview meetings. (See the Meeting Schedule in the Appendices). Prior to each meeting the consultant and the SHPC Staff prepared a PowerPoint presentation displaying each property and the reason for their local significance. The consultant arranged the photos in chronological order and gave an excellent overview of different architectural styles and set the properties in the context of broader trends occurring in the region and nation. (A Sample PowerPoint presentation was submitted with the Preliminary Report). At each meeting the SHPC Executive Director outlined the benefits of owning a historic property, summarized the process for designation, and responded to participant questions and concerns. She urged owners to voice any issues that they might have regarding the proposed designation, and to feel free

in the future to contact the Staff or Consultant if additional questions or need for clarifications arose.

At each meeting various hand-outs were available, including the “Purpose & Overview of the SHPC,” the composition of the Commission by category with profiles of both individual and Staff members, the “Process for Designating LHDs,” and a schedule of upcoming neighborhood and overview meetings. (See sample handouts in the Appendices). In addition, copies were on hand of the City’s Historic District Ordinance, Design Review Guidelines, and various articles and reports regarding historic districting.

All ten of these presentations occurred over a six week period in July and August and were held in different neighborhood venues to ensure both date and location convenience for all affected owners. Two of the larger neighborhood talks were offered twice, on separate weeks, to insure maximum attendance by interested owners and the general public. The two final meetings were held at the Community Center of the Visiting Nurses Association and at the Somerville Central Public Library, and each offered a selective overview of historic properties representing every section of the City. These last two meetings were targeted to the general public or property owners who had missed prior presentations due to vacations or other conflicts, or were interested in the history of other areas of Somerville. Several Commission members came to a presentation(s) and all of the SHPC Staff participated in every meeting, allowing each to respond to questions from the audience, both individually and as a group. In a few cases the Staff had individual meetings with a homeowner who was either housebound or otherwise unable to attend one of the scheduled evening meetings.

At the conclusion of the meeting series the SHPC Subcommittee met with the Project Team to review the progress to date. The Staff then sent via postal mail, or e-mail when available, a second information packet to all of the proposed owners, including those who did not attend any meetings, asking for their feedback about the importance of local historic districts and their interest in being designated, with a return request by September 6, 2006. (A copy of the “Opinion Survey” and a sheet summarizing the responses received is included in the Appendices.) The mailing also included a four-page “Frequently Asked Questions About Historic Designation (FAQ)” handout, and a “Profile of Commission Members.”

Shortly thereafter the Staff reviewed the Opinion Surveys, as well as other responses received from owners via phone calls, emails and meeting notes, and compiled, in concert with the Consultant, a summary list for the Commission to review and discuss as part of its deliberations. The Consultant outlined his survey findings and recommendations in a Draft Preliminary Report that he presented to the SHPC over two meetings in mid-September.

A. Property Selection Criteria for Preliminary Report

The Commission held special meetings on September 11th and 15th to review all of the properties that their Consultant proposed for LHD designation. To familiarize the Commission with his recommendations, the Consultant gave PowerPoint presentations on

each of the properties, broken down by neighborhoods. Commission members rated each property based upon a number of criteria, such as the historical, architectural and cultural importance of the building; whether the building was part of a larger district or a critical part of the streetscape; and/or whether the building was endangered by the threat of irreversible alterations. The Commission also used a chart previously prepared by the LHD Expansion Subcommittee to standardize their evaluation criteria. Individual Commissioners who were not able to attend both of these review and evaluation meetings were able to come to City Hall to review and evaluate the properties at their own convenience.

Members of the Somerville Historic Preservation met on two separate occasions as a large group, and then in smaller groups to review all of the proposed LHD properties. The Commission reviewed and discussed all of the information that was provided to them by the Staff and the Consultant at their-re-scheduled (due to Primary Day conflict) regular meeting on September 26.th Due to the nearly 200 properties being proposed, not all of them could be fully assessed by the Commissioners, including some properties whose current owners had notified the Staff that they did not want to be designated, for various reasons. Taking this into consideration, the Commission decided to fully accept the Consultant's designation recommendations, with the caveat that those properties whose owners did not wish to be designated, were to be more fully considered at a special future meeting of the Commission. At that meeting it was expected that Commission members would have more advance notice of this important discussion and they would also have the benefit of individual members contacting directly some of the dissenting owners, to better understand the nature of their opposition to designation. In the meantime the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to keep all of the properties recommended by the Consultant on the list included within the Preliminary Report and to submit the Report to the Somerville Planning Board and the Massachusetts Historical Commission for their 60-day review and comment period.

JBW STOPPED EDITING HERE!

Add info. re: submission of PR to MHC and PB, missing info req'd by MHC, and then the LHD PH being sponsored in Feb. Summarize outcome of PH (use and refer to PH minutes

Following submission of the Preliminary Report the Consultant helped the Staff prepare a PowerPoint presentation and script to be used at the Commission's public hearing. The presentation and script was illustrated with a selection of photographs believed to represent the full variety of historic elements and wealth of architectural styles found in the total package of recommended properties.

Revisions needed from here on.

In the meantime the consultant and the SHPC Staff prepared this Preliminary Report for submission to the Somerville Planning Board and the Massachusetts Historical Commission for their review and comments. Following a lapse of sixty (60) days from Report submission the SHPC expects to hold a public hearing to which it will invite all owners of properties proposed for inclusion within a LHD.

